

## Oral history with 64 year old white male, Concord, Massachusetts (Transcription)

Speaker: Concord's Social Circle started in 1782, which is a long time ago. Because a group of men that had been planning Concord's part in the American Revolution from the days when the provincial Congress was first set up in 1774 had so much fun getting together without their wives, that when the war was over, they had no more excuse to go out in the evening. So they invented one and put together the Social Circle in Concord with the understanding, and the charter states this, that even though the welfare of the town was considered, the group would not take any official action as a group but be a means of communication between themselves. Most of the members at the time were active in town government anyway. Through the years up until about World War I, when the town really began to grow, it was fairly representative of the town, with usually a couple of selectmen, the moderator, the minister of the First Parish Church, a doctor and a lawyer. Sam Staples, the jailor who put Henry Thoreau in jail for not paying his taxes, was a member. Henry was not. Henry was considered locally to be a no-good bum and they wouldn't dream of having anybody like that in the Circle even though Mr. Emerson, who was well respected, spoke for him. They never got up and said the Circle suggests or demands or requires that the town do this or that or the other thing. But it was a very good place for two political opponents, on some major issue in town that was being debated with more heat than light, to

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Speaker: sit down to dinner with a drink in their hands and say "Hey, <gap> you really are loose in the flue on this issue and now the way that I see it is thus and such." And these

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things could be reasoned out calmly and peacefully, no face was being lost and no great triumphs were being made before a public audience. It was useful for that. In recent years, with the population of the town around 18,000, and the membership of the Circle frozen as it is at twenty-five, it obviously cannot be representative of the town or be very influential in the decisions of the town. But yet the moderator, several selectmen, the minister of the First Parish, doctors, lawyers, a justice of the Supreme Judicial Court are all members. To me the most interesting part of it is that of the current membership of twenty-five, I would guess fifteen have not lived in Concord more than fifteen years. I think I am the eighth generation on my mother's side to be a member of the Circle and I hope that wasn't the only reason I got in. I like to think it was all the trouble I made for several other members of the Circle when I was a trustee of the Concord Free Public Library. The library is the institution I have devoted most of my interest in the years since the war. <gap> had died before I joined the Circle, but I knew him pretty well. He was very fond of my father <gap> and Charles Francis Adams, who really only summered in Concord, were very interested in the library and had supported my father in the early 1930s when dad was asked to enlarge the Concord library.

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Speaker: Dad said he would do it but he wanted to change the exterior from Victorian Gothic to Georgian Colonial. These men said, <gap> tear the whole thing down if you want to and start over, we'll give you the money." The central octagon of the library is an extraordinarily handsome room. Dad said that this meant so much to him in his years in the town and to mother, who of course had always lived here. Both of them knew a great many people in Concord and had taken the trouble to ask them about the library, and they all loved that central room. It had a meaning for every one of them. So dad had that room cleaned out to the point it was at when the first architect had first finished it. And they changed the accents on the outside, changed the brick, took off the pointed windows and

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refinished it as a Georgian structure and added reading rooms on each side. Dad's theory was if a building is well proportioned, you can finish it in any style you like. If it's badly proportioned it's like a photographic negative that was exposed when the camera was out of focus. No matter what you do to it, it's going to look lousy. This was his demonstration. Judge Keyes and Mr. Adams supported my father vigorously. The Judge said precisely what he thought and usually phrased it a little more strongly than was necessary, and he didn't care how many people's toes he trampled on. There were many who were afraid of him and there were some who hated him with a passion, which was wrong because even though he was not a kindly man, he was decent and a brilliant man and he was a honest man. Even if

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Speaker: he didn't like you, he would never cheat you or back you into a position in which there was no stand. There were a few people in the Circle that would call to see if the Judge was coming to Circle and if he was coming, they wouldn't. I'm a little distressed by the library now. We're having the same problems here on a smaller scale that the Boston Public Library is, expenses skyrocketing and funding going down. What upsets me the most, and it really upsets me, is the apparently determined campaign to steal as many books from the library as possible. The number of books that are going, in proportion to the size of the town and the holdings of the library, would indicate that it is not just casual theft but very deliberate looting. Concord has always been proud of its library, always taken care of it, and it's theory for years was if you give people the best, they will respect it and take care of it. If you cut corners, you're in trouble and now we're in trouble. I just don't know what the basis for this is, and it distresses me and it distresses the staff. The cuts in funds which are necessary, I'm afraid, because of the tax situation in the town put us in real trouble. The library is run by two boards and a professional staff. The library corporation was set up by Mr. Munroe when he gave the library in 1873. The corporation

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was to own the building, maintain it, and to manage the private gifts of books, money, or whatever comes to it. Not on tape

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Speaker: The town library committee goes back before the founding of this library when they had a small library in the town hall which was open several afternoons a week and in the evening for the Lyceum lectures. That was the library Mr. Munroe saw Mr. Emerson working in. In those days, the library committee was elected by the town but it is now appointed-by the selectmen. That committee appropriates the town funds which are spent for books and salaries and in the old days it was a dollar for each rateable poll and the dog tax refund. That was the standard New England formula for maintaining a library. In recent years there has been substantial money voted by town meeting to pay salaries. Librarians work for the town and they are managed by the town library committee. This has worked out well because you have two committees responsible to different agencies, one the corporation and the other the town, each looking over each other's shoulder, each working with each other, each settling various problems between them. The library committee is usually more closely aware of what is going on than the corporation. My father's work is very evident throughout town. The second house he ever built was the one I grew up in on Simon Willard Road back of Nashawtuc Hill. When we lived there, there was no other house in sight, and we came through <gap> farm yard to get to it. My father built the house in 1914 for \$10,000 and the house sold a few years ago for \$250,000 and is still a very beautiful house.